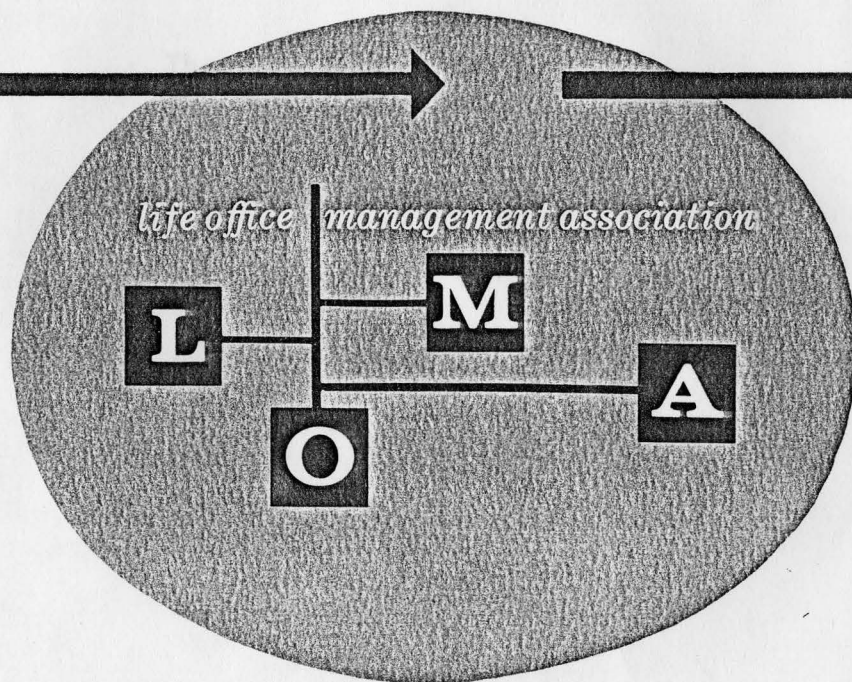


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# ATTITUDE SURVEYS



PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION REPORT NO. 41

719577

Life Office Management Association

757 Third Avenue • New York, N.Y. 10017



PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION REPORTS

Personnel Administration Report No. 41

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## Attitude Surveys

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### Manuals

- Supervisory Training Manual (1961)
- LOMA Orientation Manual (1964)
- Employment Interviewing Manual (1967)
- Principles of Organization Manual (1968)

This report is being distributed to those individuals whose names are on LOMA's Personnel Administration Report list, which includes members of the Personnel Administration and Research Council and its associated committees and the LOMA Board of Directors.



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## Preface

In 1965, the Personnel Research Committee became interested in the development of an attitude survey which LOMA member companies could use. There had been a number of requests from member companies for such an instrument, and there was particular interest in establishing normative data in the industry so that a company that became involved in this particular type of employee-management communication could have "bench marks" that would be relevant to their employees.

After the committee adopted the project, it was felt that there were probably many company management people who needed a brief explanation of the "do's and don'ts," the advantages and disadvantages along with potential pitfalls in using attitude surveys. Theodore Dumstorf, psychologist at Allstate Life Insurance Company at the time, volunteered to prepare such a document. The following pages are the results of his efforts, for which the Association is most grateful.

Current members of the Personnel Research Committee who also have contributed greatly to the entire project are: Isabel Horan, John Hancock; Howard J. Kinslinger, New England Life; Philip H. Kriedt, Prudential; A. H. Malo, Kemper Insurance; Arthur R. Owens, Metropolitan; Wayne W. Sorenson, State Farm Life; Larry J. Stanford, Aetna Life & Casualty; Thomas Vris, Equitable Society; Carl S. Weiser, North American Life & Casualty; and Charles Wills, Nationwide Life.

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This report has been prepared to help companies determine whether or not to consider a survey. It attempts to cover the points to consider about a survey and to answer many of the questions raised in its planning, execution and follow-up. This report will not tell a company how to conduct a survey, but it will help a company to decide whether or not it should conduct one. Such a survey requires expert guidance. If there is no one on the company staff who can serve in that capacity, the LOMA Personnel Administration Division or a reputable consultant should be employed.

## What Is Employee Attitude? Introduction

The purpose of attitude surveys is to register and evaluate employee feelings and opinions. In this role, they are valuable to management and employees alike. They are one of the best methods by which employees can communicate with top management, because they give employees an opportunity to "let off steam"--to express themselves freely without embarrassment or fear of reprisal. Because of the frankness they solicit, attitude surveys provide management with important insights into employee feelings about "the Establishment"--feelings that probably would not emerge in open talks. In addition, by asking employees to evaluate management personnel, policies and practices, attitude surveys are likely to promote a more congenial feeling on the part of employees toward the company.

These advantages, plus the apparent simplicity of the survey method, have led many companies to consider using surveys. However, company studies often reveal many unanticipated questions, problems and resistance that might hinder a survey.

This report has been prepared to help companies determine whether or not to consider a survey. It attempts to cover the points to consider about a survey and to answer many of the questions raised on its planning, execution and followup. This report will not tell a company how to conduct a survey, but it will help a company to decide whether or not it should conduct one. Such a survey requires expert guidance. If there is no one on the company staff who can serve in that capacity, the LOMA Personnel Administration Division or a reputable consultant should be employed.

# What Is Employee Morale?

Morale, particularly good morale, is a condition in which an employee understands, agrees with, and accepts company objectives, and willingly works toward their achievement because reaching these goals helps him attain his own goals. Morale is not the equivalent of "happiness," as some management people believe. It is marked by an esprit de corps that reflects a basic satisfaction with the company and with the rewards it offers. It is a reflection of an employee's involvement with the job, with the company and with its success.

Employee involvement is--or should be--a matter of management interest. Job satisfaction does not come solely from paychecks. Nowadays, with jobs sufficiently plentiful to provide the wherewithal by which an employee can feed, clothe, and house his family, he seeks to satisfy another class of needs--personal needs, such as his self-realization as an individual. He looks to his work to help him become the kind of person he would like to be. He may want to satisfy the need to develop further skills in line with his chosen career, to advance through the organization, or even to gratify needs not related to the work situation. This is true whether he is a technician, craftsman, clerk or manager.

Generally, the attitude of today's worker is that he is investing his career and his future in the organization for which he works, rather than just hiring out his skills or talents. Therefore, he will look for and do his best in the job that promises the greatest degree of personal satisfaction. He will produce best when he is realizing the satisfaction of needs that go beyond the primary ones--when he can become involved in his work.

## The Relationship of Morale to Productivity

In the sense that morale has been defined, morale and productivity are related. This relationship cannot always be demonstrated in a directly measurable way because many factors affect the amount and quality of a man's work, just as many factors affect his morale. For example, the group he works with can spur him on or hinder his efforts; the kind of supervision and training he gets can affect his output.

There are also a variety of incentives that have either long- or short-range effects on productivity. Fear is one of them. Being fearful of losing one's job is usually an incentive to do better. However, for most employees in this mobile "seller's" employment market, fear has only limited influence. There is considerable evidence to support the theory that threatening or pressuring employees to produce has, at best, short-term effect. After a while, resistance becomes prevalent and turnover increases or production decreases.

Economic incentive is often considered to be another effective production booster. But continual increases in pay do not always produce corresponding increases in productivity. More money may be desirable, but it will not always buy the kind of motivation required to raise production to prime levels and maintain it there.



After some of the basic needs associated with money have been satisfied, an employee feels the need to be involved with his occupation and his career. In the ultimate sense, as an employee involves himself more personally with his work, he begins to see the company's image as a reflection of himself. He considers himself to have an investment in the company and is concerned about its image. (Even clerks will complain when forced to put production ahead of quality in an organization that emphasizes service to the customer.)

## The Relationship of Morale to Participation

As the feeling of involvement increases, so does the desire to participate more actively in the company. The employee develops a sense of proprietorship that results in his wanting to have some influence--at least to the extent that he can talk with someone about things that affect his job. If he does not have this opportunity, history has shown that he is likely to demand it (for example, the growth of labor unions).

Formal methods for ensuring that the employee will be heard are now commonplace--participative management programs in which the employees meet with management to resolve work issues; grievance channels, with or without union direction; effective communication programs; and attitude surveys. Whatever method is used, each represents an established procedure by which the individual employee can take his suggestions and complaints to management--even over the head of his immediate superiors, if necessary (a drastic departure from the traditional organizational method of operating).

By recognizing the significance of employee participation through unimpeded communication, and by providing the mechanism through which it can function, management is acting in accordance with accepted principles. By increasing employees' personal satisfaction, management is alert to the prime factors in the positive attitudes. When these needs are satisfied, high morale and improved productivity result and a state of organizational health exists. When they are unsatisfied, not only is there low morale and friction, but employees also frequently turn to some outside source to represent them in their demand for these rights.

## Why Is Morale Important?

In summary, morale is important because:

- It represents a condition in which the employee agrees with and seeks to accomplish the goals of the organization, knowing that the achievement of these goals will best satisfy his own personal needs.
- It is, in the broader sense, one of the most significant factors in the determination of productivity.
- It is a measure of the degree of involvement an employee has with his work and, extending that concept, of his opportunity to have a voice in the decisions that will affect him and the conditions under which he will do his job.
- It is a reflection of the state of organizational health and since it represents all of the above, an organization with high morale demonstrates its recognition and appreciation of those factors critical to growth and survival in the industrial environment of today.

## Are Surveys Necessary?

Recognizing the importance of job satisfaction and high morale raises the question of whether they should be measured by an attitude survey. Many companies expend substantial sums and great efforts to achieve high levels of worker satisfaction, without ever knowing the extent to which they are successful. They rely on feedback from within the organization itself or presume that, because the effort has been made, the anticipated results have occurred.

Morale could certainly be assessed informally through regular channels of communication. Supervisors generally know what is going on and, where the relationship between levels of authority is sound and information finds its way to the top accurately and quickly, there is no need for a formal survey.

Communication being what it is, however, it is rare that top management has either reliable or timely information about the exact state of the employee attitudes. For example, where these attitudes are poor, where productivity is low, or where errors or losses are high, supervisors are naturally reluctant to pass along this information to their superiors because, in many companies, they will place themselves in a poor light. They believe bosses get irritated by bad news and like to hear only good news. And the larger the organization, with more levels of supervision in the hierarchy, the less likely it is that management has the true picture.

In addition to the likelihood of delay and distortion in communication, the informal assessment of morale has one other serious drawback. When things change, it is difficult to evaluate the extent of the change and whether or not it is significant. The accurate assessment of the amount of change requires quantitative data that a formal survey with relevant norms provides.

An attitude survey provides a direct and rapid channel of communication from the lowest level in the company to the highest. Furthermore, it provides information on the intermediate levels, and in this way communication blockage can often be identified.

A survey has another advantage--its confidential nature. Most surveys are designed to allow employees to respond anonymously, with the promise to treat the responses confidentially. Experience has shown that people will more often speak their minds when they can do it in confidence. Where communication is normally poor, the confidential nature of the survey encourages employees to contribute their ideas and suggestions.

### When Should Surveys Be Conducted?

There are times when a survey is not a good idea. One time is immediately after some major organizational change within the company. Another is when there is evidence of strong friction within the organization. The probability of obtaining reliable information under either of these circumstances is very low.

Attitudes take some time to form and, where there has been considerable change, employees need time to reassess the situation before they really know how they feel. A new management, for example, will cause employees to reserve judgment until they find out what will change and how the change will affect them. A major realignment of reporting relationships and responsibilities will have the same effect. Therefore, it is a good idea to defer a survey for some time in order to let the changes take effect and give employees time to evaluate them.

Management often makes changes in policy and procedure to improve company operations. Automation, for example, will likely disrupt the status quo considerably. It would seem reasonable to make a survey just before the conversion to determine the probable effects, and immediately after to assess the results. The time to make the initial survey is quite early--before the contemplated change is made known to the employees.

In such an instance, a prechange survey almost demands a postchange evaluation. Then, the effects of the program can be determined accurately and, if further action is needed, it can be planned and carried out. This survey should take place after the change, when employees who have been retrained or displaced have had time to settle into their new jobs and automation is a fact of life--if not an accepted fact.

Friction within the company also establishes a climate that is not conducive to the accurate assessment of morale. If the problem is at the corporate level, employees may be confused and have no basis for evaluation. Should the friction exist between management and employees, the response to a survey is likely to be essentially emotional rather than a rational assessment of their feelings toward the job. It also is unlikely that a survey purporting to reflect employee attitudes in an objective manner could receive management's unbiased evaluation under the circumstances. If it were possible for management to view the results with an open mind, knowledge of employee reactions and the intensity of those reactions could be quite helpful in resolving the conflict.

### **Do Surveys Undermine Management's Right To Manage?**

One of the objections to an attitude survey comes from the belief that allowing employees to express their views represents an abdication of the traditional right of the manager to manage. The idea of a survey strikes some managers as an open invitation for the employees to tell them what to do.

Realistically, this is most unlikely. As employees become more sophisticated in understanding their role in the company, they also understand more about the power structure of the organization and its role in dealing with the complex problems involved in running the company, in coping with competition and in meeting the demands of the marketplace. Generally, they do not want the responsibility of dealing with such complexities. Yet, while they have no desire to run the business, they do have some rather perceptive--and sometimes acrid--comments about that portion of the operation that directly affects them.

The employee perceives his work situation basically in terms of his personal and individual needs. Although he is generally concerned with the success of the company, he is more often trying to improve his own situation. Therefore, he cannot be criti-



cized for giving an opinion he believes will improve his future. Rarely is this meant as a threat to his superior's authority.

## Do Surveys Create Morale Problems?

Another question arises that often deters management from making an attitude survey: Is it not likely that a survey will stir up trouble and create dissension where none existed before? The assumption is that, by inquiring about matters such as pay, management and supervision, a survey would have the effect of suggesting to employees that something was wrong in these areas. Thus, a survey might create morale problems.

In reality, morale problems either exist or do not exist. It seems highly unlikely that any group of employees would not know when they had a problem and would need an attitude survey to identify one for them. Rather than create problems, an attitude survey averts them. By allowing employees to talk about things that bother them, some of the tension is dissipated. Conditions may not seem so bad after a problem has had a thorough airing. Also, since people like to have their opinions sought, an attitude survey may even stimulate a certain amount of good will.

There is another benefit for the company--by measuring attitudes, management may learn of problem situations that it didn't know existed. It may also find some positive points--things that employees feel are being done properly. Management can take pride in and credit for these things. However, should the survey disclose problems, management will have to assume that they already existed and the survey merely identified them.

## Will Surveys Reveal the Truth?

Management is also apt to question the reliability of what employees say during the course of a survey. Will they tell the truth?

Since employees do feel that they have an investment in the organization, if they are convinced that the company really wants to know what they think and that only good can come from being frank and honest, they will probably tell the truth--as they see it.

To repeat an important point, employees must believe that management wants to know what they think. If they don't believe this, the survey should not be made. If the relations between management and employees are such that there is mistrust of management and its practices, a survey is not likely to produce reliable information. Rather, the employee will keep his real feelings to himself and give management what he thinks it wants to hear.

On the other hand, where the employee believes in management's desire to know what is going on, he will generally give a true report of his situation--again, as he sees it. This is an important characteristic of survey results: They are statements of how the employee sees things, made from his perspective and containing his interpretations. Survey results have been dismissed on the grounds that they are not true ("true" meaning that they do not conform to what management thinks or knows the situation to be).



It takes but a moment of reflection to identify several factors that influence the employee's interpretation of situations and events. One of these is the availability of company information to the employee. Having filtered down through the organization, the original message may have become somewhat distorted. In addition, the employee will interpret the information in terms of his own perspective, so that his appraisal of a situation may be different from management's.

When employees participate in a survey, management must be ready to accept their responses as "true" when considering remedial action. This will undoubtedly raise problems from time to time that will make survey results more difficult to interpret. Followup action will be more difficult to plan because the same elements that influenced the development of attitudes in the first place will influence the actions designed to change them. Management must take these factors into consideration if morale is to be improved.

### **What Will a Survey Do for Management?**

With all this, it is not surprising that management will ask: Is a survey really worth the effort? The answer may be found in the following summary of reasons for conducting a survey:

- It gives management a timely, accurate reading of the level of employee morale.
- It establishes a channel of communication from employee to management that recognizes the employee's right to appeal.
- It provides information on the effect of changes made in the organization and, by giving a statement of the current state of employee thinking, it helps management plan future changes.
- It gives an indication of the intensity and direction of employee feelings and, where these are negative, it helps management find ways to improve.
- It assists in the alleviation of problem situations by offering employees an opportunity to express their views and to "blow off steam."
- It gives the employee a deeper sense of involvement in contributing to the improvement of the company.
- It reveals problems that were previously unknown.
- It gives management a view of employee perspective that can be invaluable in analyzing the effects of management policies and practices and in planning for the future.

These benefits, accruing to both management and the employee, make a survey well worth the time and effort that go into it.

## Is It Necessary To Follow Up on Survey Results?

It is desirable that all members of management be in a receptive frame of mind before a survey is made, but it is essential that top management be convinced that some kind of followup action must take place. Therefore, a most appropriate time not to conduct a survey is when there is some doubt that management will do anything about the results. It has been said that making a survey is like pulling the pin on a hand grenade--once it is pulled, something has to be done with it.

The reason for this lies in the general conditions surrounding the importance of morale. The employee's response to his total work environment includes his belief in the right to express his views and opinions about his job. Where these are solicited by management, as through a survey, the intent to follow up is implied. If nothing happens, this can be interpreted as an attitude on the part of management that, while it may have asked for opinions, it in no way feels obliged to consider what was said as having any value. If nothing is done, management will have created a two-edged problem--employees may think that management is not really interested and may refuse to cooperate further, or they may be provoked to act in some fashion that will express their dissatisfaction.

Management must be prepared to do something about the information received from the survey, or the survey should not be made.

## Is a Consultant Necessary?

In many situations, a consultant is indeed necessary. He can give management the objectivity and the experience required to conduct a survey properly. In all situations, some kind of expert advice is needed to avoid possible pitfalls and to get the greatest benefits from a survey.

In smaller companies, where members of the corporate staff know one another fairly well, a consultant can maintain the necessary impartiality and anonymity. Where employees have negative attitudes toward management, a consultant brings an aura of objectivity that helps the employee respond in a more honest and straightforward fashion.

The consultant can also prove helpful where management thinks it knows all the answers. Without him, management may develop survey results that will verify what it already believes. A consultant also makes certain that the survey questionnaire provides the employee with the opportunity to talk about his problems and is not limited to those areas management thinks are important.

But there are some drawbacks to the use of a consultant. He may lack any real knowledge about company operations. This is especially evident when the consultant proposes to use a "stock" questionnaire that is not really appropriate to the work group. To avoid this, the consultant should work with management on questionnaire content. The use of open or nondirected interviews will also help in this case. In addition, the consultant's lack of knowledge about the organization and its makeup may produce some inappropriate interpretations of survey results. A naive management that accepts such data and acts on it may find that, in the end, it is in a worse position than it was previously.

There is little doubt that a survey requires the guidance of someone knowledgeable about methods and procedures. He does not have to be a consultant in the formal sense. He can be someone within the company who has sufficient previous experience and sophistication to guide management in the proper direction so that the survey will produce the greatest benefit. He must be someone who has the "ear" and the respect of top management; one who can make his points and make them stick. Where this cannot be accomplished, a consultant is required.

## Conclusion

In consideration of the state of today's industrial society, a knowledge of what employees think, feel and believe is essential to good management. If communication within a company is such that this knowledge can be rapidly and reliably obtained, a formal survey may not be needed; where it cannot be so obtained, a survey should be made.

Other benefits can be gained from a survey, and management must balance these against the expenditure of time, effort and money. If the decision is to go ahead, management should proceed with expert assistance, with an open mind about the probable outcome and, most important of all, with a positive attitude and the determination to use the results to the best advantage of all concerned.





